

Prescott National Forest Plan Revision...

It's Final!

Hi, I'm Teresa Chase, Forest Supervisor for the Prescott National Forest. I'm happy to announce that the long-awaited Land and Resource Management Plan (Plan) for the Prescott National Forest is now signed and final.

~Teresa Chase



A Bit of History

It was nearly 10 years ago, in early 2006, that the Prescott put together a planning team and started gathering information on resource conditions and the needs for change from the 1987 plan direction. There were numerous setbacks over the years, including the lawsuits and enjoinders of the 2005 and 2008 planning rules. The Prescott elected to not wait for another new planning rule and was allowed to proceed with its plan revision under the direction of the 1982 planning rule.

The Plan is the product of years of collaborative effort among the forest planning team, forest leadership, the Regional Office planning group, and all the individuals, organizations, agencies, and tribes who worked with us and shared ideas, recommendations, comments, and their time and energy.

In fall 2012, many of you reviewed and provided feedback on our draft plan and accompanying draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) which analyzed the effects of the draft plan and three other alternatives. We received 116 correspondences from individuals, agencies, and organizations that included almost 800 substantive comments on various topics.

From these comments and other input, some changes were made to the Plan to create a new

alternative, which became the final Plan. The result is a workable and insightful management plan which will guide the forest's management activities over the next 15 years or so.

The final Plan is aimed at achieving or moving toward desired conditions for all the physical, biological, and social and economic resources that the forest provides. Along with the desired conditions for the forest, the Plan contains objectives, which are specific actions designed to help us achieve the desired conditions. Standards and guidelines express the controls and constraints on certain activities. The Plan is strategic in nature and based on outcomes rather than outputs.

The Plan, EIS, and the Record of Decision (ROD) are available for public review at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/prescott/landmanagement/planning>.



Pronghorn Antelope

Next Steps

Now that the Plan, EIS, and ROD have been printed, a notice of availability will be published in the Federal Register. We anticipate that this notice will appear on August 7, 2015. This notice will begin a 30-day waiting period before the plan can be implemented. Also on August 7, we will publish a legal notice in the newspaper of record, the Prescott *Daily Courier*. This legal notice will begin a 90-day appeal period.



Overview of the Land and Resource Management Plan

Key Themes of the Plan

Four key themes emerged from the plan assessment and collaboration process and are reflected in the new Plan: Vibrant Communities, Resilient Ecosystems, Healthy Watersheds, and Sustainable Recreation. Each of these elements is described below.

Vibrant Communities

The Plan recognizes several social, economic, and cultural values important to communities including sustainable levels of tourism, open space and scenery, and a strong sense of place and community.

Plan objectives include:

- Fostering partnerships in support of resource-based jobs that support modern-day rural communities;
- Acting on opportunities to purchase or exchange for lands within and around the Prescott NF to retain open space values and scenery;
- Consideration of community landscape vision statements in the site-specific management of PNF lands and resources.

Expected outcomes are that shared values are taken into consideration when responding to: public access; land use, development and exchange proposals; tourism-based special uses; and quality of life concerns for area residents and visitors.

Resilient Ecosystems

A primary need for change in Plan direction is restoring fire-adapted forest and grassland ecosystems. To address this the Plan includes several components including:

- **Desired Condition descriptions** for vegetation structure and composition;
- **Objectives** specifying the use of mechanized equipment, managed fire, and domestic livestock to reduce grass, shrub, and tree densities; and
- **Standards and guidelines** for forest uses and activities.

Expected outcomes include reducing unwanted biomass while retaining important habitat features; prioritizing fuel reduction treatments near

values at risk; minimizing the spread of non-native invasive plants; and improving ecosystem resilience under a changing climate.

Healthy Watersheds

The Plan identifies **desired conditions** for healthy watersheds .

Plan **objectives** emphasize actively restoring water quality and proper functioning condition of selected watersheds, streams, and riparian areas. Watersheds that provide surface water for municipal use are given highest priority for treatment.

Expected outcomes include retaining watershed and soil functions that support native fish and other aquatic and riparian species, and providing the desired water quality, quantity and timing of flows.

Sustainable Recreation

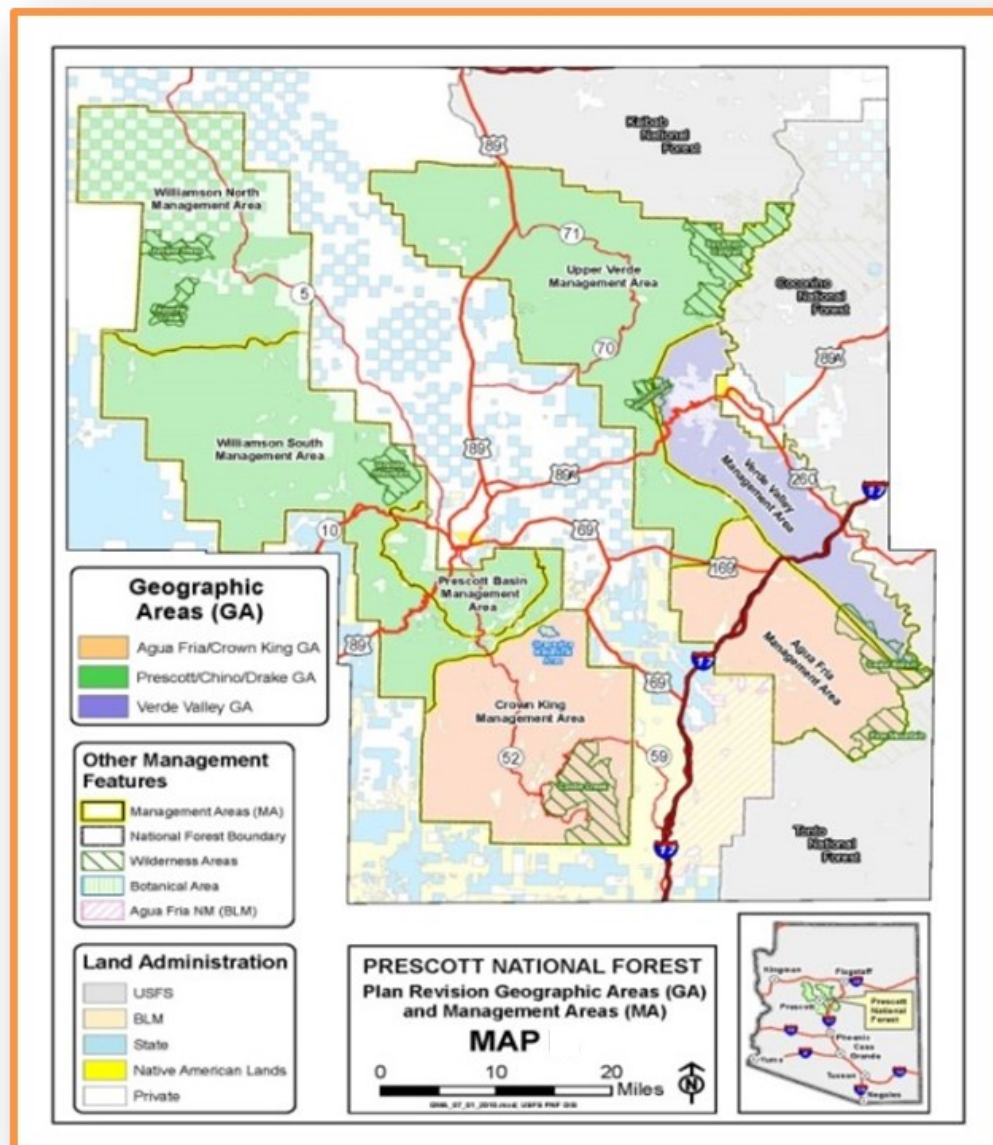
The need for **varied but sustainable recreation opportunities** was the most common theme raised by the public during plan revision gatherings.

Plan direction emphasizes sustainable operations of year-round recreation opportunities – both dispersed and developed – considering workforce and funding levels, county demographics, community-based values, and contributions from adjoining lands and outdoor recreation partners. The plan incorporates objectives for responsible shooting and forest access based on concerns from the public.

Expected outcomes include achieving a **balance between** the availability of opportunities at **developed sites** with those activities that are more **primitive and dispersed** – so that visitors enjoy the Forest while minimizing damage to critical resources.

In addition, the plan recommends additional wilderness, protects species viability, provides for desired habitat for native fish, and gives direction for motorized game retrieval off system roads.

Map of the Prescott National Forest Geographic Areas Identified During Planning



The Plan also identified three human geographic areas based on descriptions of communities located near and within the Prescott NF. In developing a recreation strategy for the forest, similar boundaries were used to divide the forest and surrounding area into three zones where the recreational emphasis is slightly different.

These geographic areas are based on how the communities viewed themselves and each other and the recreational niche they each provide. These three areas are:

- **Crown King/Agua Fria**
- **Prescott/Chino/Drake**
- **Verde Valley**

Looking Ahead ...

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Following the publication of the Notice of Availability, there is a 30-day pause before the plan can be implemented. Implementation of the plan means that projects will be designed to achieve desired conditions outlined in the plan and in accordance with plan guidance. Implementation also means following plan direction for monitoring.

The plan monitoring program is designed to answer three questions:

- 1) Did we do what we said we were going to do?
- 2) Did it work how we said it would?
- 3) Is our understanding of the science correct?

There are some minor administrative changes that we will make to the monitoring portion of the Plan in order to be consistent with the 2012 planning regulations. These changes will require that we review the list of species on the forest and identify those that are Species of Conservation Concern. Species of conservation concern are NOT species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate species. Rather they are other species for which the Regional Forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long term in the planning area. These changes will occur in following plan implementation.

IMPORTANT DATES



Notice of Availability published in the Federal Register AND
Legal notice of opportunity to appeal published in the Prescott *Daily Courier*—
90-day appeal period begins *

August 7, 2015—Notice of availability is published in the Federal Register AND
Legal notice is published in the Prescott *Daily Courier*

September 7, 2015— Revised plan may be implemented

November 5, 2015— End of 90-day appeal period

* NOTE: Recommendations for proposed wilderness areas only recommendations and are not appealable.

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**For more information,
visit our web site:**

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/prescott/home>

